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061428Z Jun 03

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 003694

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/28/2013

TAGS: PREL PGOV PINS TU

SUBJECT: DEFINING THE REPUBLIC OF TURKEY: GENERAL STAFF AND GOVERNMENT STRUGGLE WITH THEMSELVES AND EACH OTHER

REF: A. ANKARA 2521  
B. ANKARA 2666  
C. ANKARA 2122  
D. ANKARA 1350  
E. ANKARA 0418  
F. 02 ANKARA 7682  
G. 02 ANKARA 7683  
H. ISTANBUL 0776

(U) Classified by Ambassador W. Robert Pearson; reasons: 1.5 (b,d).

¶1. (C) Summary: Chief of the General Staff (TGS) Ozkok's attempt to smother disgruntlement in senior ranks and at the same time to warn ruling AK party against perceived anti-secular trends has achieved neither goal. While tensions between the military and AK, and within each, will continue, we see no likelihood under the current constellation of forces for the military to force a change of government. End summary.

¶2. (C) Chief of the TGS Ozkok's May 26 political warning in the form of a briefing for selected newspaper journalists is yet more evidence that the TGS is very unhappy:

-- Unhappy within itself (Ozkok is being pressed by a group of six to eight senior officers who hold what a broad range of journalist, political, and national security analyst contacts characterize for us as "Eurasianist, status quo, keep-military-procurement-secret" views; other TGS officers, such as J-5 chief of agreements Air Force MG Ajar, who is well connected to Ozkok, told us he agrees with the assessment that Ozkok is too soft on AK).

-- Unhappy with the AK government, which proclaims itself conservative-democratic, but which the TGS and most of the rest of the Kemalist Establishment (presidency, most of the judiciary, bureaucracy, main opposition CHP, and large majorities of the media and academe) charge is both incompetent and carrying an Islamist torch.

-- Unhappy with the fact, flexibility, and speed of change in the world.

-- Unhappy with change at home, where social change from below, a growing freedom of debate about many hitherto taboo subjects, and the government's attempt to avoid submitting its newest package of EU Copenhagen Criteria-related reforms to the military-dominated NSC for review all suggest that, as ordinary Turks consider where their country should go, the Turkish military is beginning to lose its position as the ultimate arbiter of republican probity.

¶3. (S) As many contacts -- among them premier national defense analyst Faruk Demir -- have reminded us, we should put Ozkok's latest remarks in the context of a longer series of TGS statements and growing military discomfort (refs A-F stretching back to October 2002). Ozkok's aims on May 26 were six-fold:

(A) To cut the legs off the press reports, originating in the May 23 issue of Kemalist "Cumhuriyet" that "young officers" are very uneasy about AK party and the AK government's goals. "Young officers" is a phrase redolent of the May 27, 1960 coup, engineered by young officers against both the government of the day and senior commanders, and Ozkok was determined (1) to end public speculation that his tenure is under question in the officers' ranks and (2) to restore discipline in the ranks -- his use of an oblique Ottomanesque phrase ("kerameti kendinden menkul kimseler", roughly equivalent to "Lord Muck miracle workers") to demean his TGS critics made his message to them all the blunter.

(B) While acknowledging that the TGS is not monolithic in its discussions of "ideas", to reject all speculation that there

are differences of view or any polarization in the TGS (note: to protect his image as chief of the TGS, Ozkok felt he had to assert that there is no difference of view in the TGS, but others, including MG Acar, readily admit to us that there is a heated debate, especially concerning Turkey's direction on the EU, relations with the U.S., and what to do about AK party).

(C) To declare that the TGS and AK government are not on the same wavelength.

(D) To affirm that the TGS as a whole is "uneasy" with the current political situation.

(E) To reject any discussion of a coup "under this roof" (the TGS) but to leave the journalists, and thus the public at large on alert (1) by emphasizing that the armed forces will continue its secularist struggle "to the very end" within the constitutional framework; and (2) by warning that the February 28 process (the "post-modern" coup that brought an end to the Islamist Erbakan government in 1997) is a cause and effect relationship, and "with the reasons for February 28 continuing, its effects will continue."

(F) To defend himself against the charges -- which appear to originate with the high-ranking generals aligned against him -- that he is too democratic and Western-oriented to be a strong guardian of core "secularist" values; Ozkok said that his attachment to democratic values and the benefits of having served in Western billets strengthen his ability to defend core values.

14. (C) Ozkok's briefing has produced sound and fury, but uneven effect.

15. (C) First, press and private commentaries have been as openly critical of the military's heavy-handedness as we recall ever having experienced in Turkey. Not one of the journalists, analysts, politicians or businessmen we have talked to since the briefing sees a coup as possible under current circumstances, or even desirable. However, Demir emphasized that the way Ozkok broached the coup subject leaves the door open should the AK government's performance cause widespread and sharp discontent, thereby eroding the resilient support Erdogan and AK continue to have in Anatolia. Some see Ozkok's position as lessened or, more broadly, the military's ability to intimidate politicians and the public as diminished. Emblematic of this latter view is the comment we heard from a major crude oil and molasses shipper, who expressed the hope that this controversy marks a definitive turning point toward full democracy and civilian control.

16. (S) Second, senior generals' objections to Ozkok's more patient, reasonable line appear not to have abated. Our defense and national security contacts identify seven of the generals opposed to Ozkok as Land Forces Commander Yalman, Jandarma Commander Eruygur, First Army Commander Dogan, Aegean Army Commander Tolon, Second Army Commander Turkeri, and NSC SecGen Kilinc, with Buyukanit described as playing it both ways. Buyukanit's anti-American/anti-Western remarks at a May 29 conference in Istanbul (ref H) lend weight to classifying him in this group. Cengiz Candar noted to us May 29 a report that on May 28, General Dogan, in speaking at a memorial service for a recently deceased army colleague, deliberately used the inflammatory "young officers" phrase in a way which would underscore continuing defiance of Ozkok.

17. (S) The carrying power of this group remains a subject of debate. Three contacts (Faruk Demir, a military affairs journalist, and a center-right politician with close ties to high-level retired generals) have separately told us they have heard that this group of generals aims to give Ozkok a memorandum demanding that he resign or submit to their view and get tough with AK. At the same time, MG Acar told us he sees no possibility of an "open rupture" within the military. Moreover, Ozkok has the opportunity to put his own stamp on the military this year. He can retire two of this group (who also opposed his nomination as CHOD) in summer 2003, and two more in summer 2004. He will promote a significant number of three- and four-star generals and can change up to 80% of the senior TGS staff this year.

18. (C) Third, P.M. Erdogan has publicly admonished those who would seek to foment AK-military tensions and privately acknowledged that it is essential to support Ozkok, although he told Cengiz Candar he is at a loss how to do so. AK deputy party chairman Firat affirmed to us May 30 that Erdogan is searching for a modus vivendi. At the same time,

Justice Minister Cicek; Firat; and other AK M.P.s such as former Erdogan chief of staff Comez, deputy parliamentary group chairmen Ipek and Ergin, and human rights committee deputy chairman Torun, have each reiterated to us in the past few days that the party will press ahead with its new EU harmonization reform packages. Ipek emphasized that the NSC is merely an advisory body and the fiery Torun asserted that the party is ready "to go down like Menderes" (the P.M. removed in the 1960 coup and hanged in 1961) to defend its reforms against the military. However, most of our AK interlocutors admit that they will have to slow the pace owing to TGS and NSC objections to specific reforms.

¶9. (C) Comment: Ozkok and Erdogan appear to be strange bedfellows as each grapples with lack of coherence and discipline in the ranks below and both try to figure out a modus vivendi with the other through weekly one-on-one meetings. Each tries to give direction to the divided institution (military high command, parliamentary majority) he relies on for authority and power.

¶10. (C) Given Erdogan's political savvy and the strong protection afforded him by his continuing solid support across Turkey, we see no evidence that a coup, direct or politically-engineered, is likely under current circumstances. However, aside from the pressures Ozkok faces, his and Erdogan's challenge in finding a mutually-compatible way forward is compounded by the following factors in AK: Erdogan's self-imposed isolation and consequent dearth of fresh information from outside; the uneven level of competence among party vice chairmen and parliamentary group deputy chairmen (whips); static-filled communications between party and government on the one hand and parliamentary group on the other; factions which render the party a coalition in itself; controversy over whether the party's candidates for management positions in the bureaucracy are sufficiently competent or loyal to secular precepts; and questions over the party's intentions in pursuing certain draft legislation (e.g., right to set up a prayer room -- of any denomination -- in every apartment building). See ref (F) and septel.

¶11. (C) What is clear is that Ozkok's briefing neither satisfied those in the military who oppose his approach nor intimidated AK. The tensions between the military and AK, and within each institution, will continue and affect Turkey's ability to set itself on a consistent course in any direction.

PEARSON